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C O N F I D E N T I A L HARARE 000445

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF, AF/S, AND AF/PD  
NSC FOR SENIOR DIRECTOR FRAZER  
YAOUNDE PLEASE PASS MALABO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/12/2008

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [PINS](#) [ASEC](#) [ZI](#) [EK](#)

SUBJECT: SOUTH AFRICAN TAKE ON THWARTED COUP ATTEMPT

REF: A) HARARE 417 B) HARARE 435 C) YAOUNDE 381

Classified By: DCM REWhitehead due to 1.5 (b) and (d).

1. (c) Ambassador and DCM met with South African Ambassador Jeremiah Ndou on March 11 to exchange perspectives on the detention of 70 purported mercenaries in Harare on March 7. Ndou provided a list of names, nationalities and passport numbers and confirmed that all 70 had been resident in South Africa, many of them dual nationals. He confirmed that the South African Government had been aware of the intentions of this group in advance of their arrest. He said that the Zimbabweans became suspicious when two of the mercenaries attempting to procure arms in Zimbabwe changed their story about the proposed end use of this material. He said that the group intended to travel first to Equatorial Guinea in support of a coup, then onward to DRC to dispose of some of the arms to a group near Mbuji Mayi, and finally on to Burundi for unspecified purposes.

2. (c) Ndou commiserated with us the GOZ's attempt to make propaganda hay from this incident by claiming that the US and UK were involved. He also said that the event had shifted the focus from internal politics, to the satisfaction of the GOZ. Ndou discounted Foreign Minister Mudenge's comments on capital punishment as the usual grandstanding, since the GOZ knew that the detainees could at worst be charged with making a false declaration. He said that the mercenaries would appear in court today for preliminary hearings. Ndou observed that the decision to seek arms in Zimbabwe was one of worst imaginable.

3. (c) Comment. Ndou said that he expects the tempest to calm by next week, an assessment that we share, although the GOZ may well seek to prolong coverage of the incident, including charges of US and UK involvement, to distract the world from Zimbabwe's simmering internal problems.  
SULLIVAN